

BONFIELD'S SERVICE STATION
6124 MacArthur Boulevard
~~Box 1111 Heights~~ Glen Echo Vic.
Montgomery County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-965

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PHOTOGRAPHS &

WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BONFIELD'S SERVICE STATION

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Location: 6124 MacArthur Boulevard (at the corner of Windward Place),
Bon Air Heights, Montgomery County, Maryland.

Present Owner: Walter J. Bonfield (of same address)

Present Occupant: Walter J. Bonfield

Present Use: Automobile garage and service station

Significance: Bonfield's Service Station is perhaps the only continually operating early twentieth century auto service station, virtually unaltered since the 1930's, in the metropolitan area. Very few changes have been made to this circa. 1915 site which includes original air pump and outdoor repair pit. The garage and service station stands as a tribute to the development and growth of the age of the automobile. The effects of the automobile, seen in the tremendous increase of mobility, and thus the significance of sites such as Bonfield's Service Station have been often been overlooked as part of the seemingly too recent, familiar past. Thus, although not a terribly old structure itself, the relatively recent history of the automobile makes Bonfield's a fairly early site. In addition, service industries such as automotive stations are often subject to periodic upgrading, and therefore are not often long-lived. Bonfield's Service Station was established to cater to traffic along this once federally owned stretch of road which is still a main route between Maryland and the District of Columbia.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa. 1914. According to Mr. Bonfield, the garage was here approximately 10 to 20 years before his father began renting it in 1927. The date on the original air pump reads 1914.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The auto repair station was originally owned by a Mr. Posey. Mr. Bonfield's father began renting the building and operating the garage in 1927. Mr. Walter J. Bonfield, the current owner, purchased the property in 1934, following the death of Mr. Posey.
3. Builder: The building was reportedly constructed by Mr. Posey.

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4. Alterations and additions: The building has remained virtually unchanged. Mr. Bonfield added steel beams for the support of the structure. The streamlined Moderne metal and neon sign, complete with clock, which reads "Road Service- Bonfield's- Auto Repairs" was added approximately 45 years ago. To either side of the building, Mr. Bonfield added an outdoor repair pit. One sits adjacent to the original pit, scaled for use on the repair of Model-T's. The original pumps (2) have been replaced, and a modern gasoline pump sits on the same site.

B. Historical Context:

This building was constructed in the early twentieth century to service a new and growing industry, that of automobile travel. Bonfield's was built specifically as an auto repair garage to which was later added gasoline pumps. According to the Historical Statistics of the United States, the number of registered cars more than tripled during the 1920's to 23 million by 1930. Along with it came the proliferation of wayside auto services and businesses, catering to the needs of both automobiles and their passengers. Thus, Bonfield's marks the arrival of the age of the automobile.

The garage is just northwest of the district line on what was originally called the Conduit Road. The road was named for the old brick water conduit which feeds water from the Maryland reservoir into Washington, D.C. The road was federally owned due to the importance of this conduit. Because of its federal ownership, it was one of the few roads that an automobile with a tag from any state could drive on before reciprocal tag agreements, when a car had to be licensed in each state in which it was driven. Following World War II, the road was renamed MacArthur Boulevard in honor of General Douglas MacArthur, who began his career with the Army Corps of Engineers. MacArthur Boulevard is still a main route between Maryland and Washington, D.C.

Mr. Bonfield (father of the current owner) was an Englishman who had been stationed in this area during World War I. He decided afterwards to settle here with his young family. He operated a auto repair business in the district first and then in 1927 began renting this building from the owner, Mr. Posey. The business was started strictly as an auto repair shop. According to Mr. Walter Bonfield, the son, the tavern which once stood next door to the garage had a gasoline pump outside so there was no need for one here. In 1934 Walter Bonfield purchased the property. The service garage became an Esso Station and gasoline pumps were added. This was a common practice of oil companies during the early twentieth century. In order to keep up with the demand for gas stations (and save on the cost of new construction), existing businesses like stores and garages would be furnished with a tank and pumps and supplied quickly and easily through the company. Bonfield's operated as such until 1970 when Exxon built a new station a block away. At that point, Bonfield's changed to Texaco. The Texaco sign hangs from a pole in front and to the side of the building.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This was built as a vernacular, strictly utilitarian structure. There is little ornamentation, with the exception of the stylized Moderne sign hanging across the facade. Because it was built as an automobile repair shop and not as a gas station, it does not conform to the traditional designs of early gas stations which generally included a small rectangular building with a roof extending to cover a drive-thru and an island of pumps in front of the building. Instead, the gas pump at Bonfield's sits as it always has, directly in front and just to the side of the main bay of the garage. The first story is an open garage space filled with automotive parts, supplies, etc. On the second floor are living quarters.

2. Condition of the fabric: The building appears to be in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This is a two story, front facing gable roofed, rectangularly shaped building. It is three bays across (two on the second story) and three bays deep. The building faces southeast.

2. Foundation: The foundation is of rock-faced concrete block. Because of the location of the building on a downward slope, the foundation is much higher in the rear and is level with the ground at the facade.

3. Walls: The walls are of frame siding with corner boards. There is some asbestos shingling on the first story facade.

4. Structural system, framing: It is of balloon frame construction, later reinforced with steel beams.

5. Chimneys: A single brick stack appears to the center of the building, on the southeast slope.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entry to the garage, a sliding, barn-like door, is centered on the facade. To the east side is an entryway to the second floor apartment, with a broken pediment above. There is an other entry, towards the front of the southwest elevation. The doors are wood panel.

b. Windows: On the southern side of the facade is a fixed, four light display window. The windows on the second story facade are

larger than the windows found elsewhere on the building. They are eight over one, double hung sash windows. In the gable end of the facade is a small, single light attic casement window. The other windows are six over one sash.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The building has a front facing gable roof. It is covered with composition shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: The roof overhangs slightly, with exposed rafters in the side eaves.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces southeast. Its orientation is, as expected, to the road, MacArthur Boulevard, a main route between Maryland and Washington, D.C. The service station and garage rests on a downward slope with a fairly dense growth of trees to the sides and rear. The area between the building and the roadway is paved with light colored brick.

2. Outbuildings, etc.: To either side of the structure are inground repair pits. To the southwest is a single pit and to the northeast are two, including the original pit scaled to accomodate Model-T's. Other outdoor fixtures include a 1914 air pump, old kerosene tanks and a modern gas pump.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views: Mr. Walter Bonfield has in his possession a number of historic views of the garage. These photographs date from 1927, the year the Bonfield family first began operation of the garage, to the present.

B. Interviews: Mr. Walter J. Bonfield, current owner and operator, June 30, 1987.

C. Bibliography:

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National Park Service
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ADDENDUM TO:
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